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Nirjala Ekadasi

Nirjala Ekadasi occurs during the Jyestha (May/June) month and a description of this fantastically gracious day is found in the Brahma-vaivarta Purana.

Once Bhimasena, the younger brother of Yudhisthira, asked the best of sages Srila Vyasadeva, "O great sage, yogi and knower of the Vedas, please hear my humble request. My elder brother Yudhisthira, mother Kunti devi, brothers Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, and Draupadi fast completely on the Ekadasi day. Yudhisthira is often encouraging me to fast and while I know it is the injunction of the scriptures, and I have tried; I simply am unable to fast. My hunger is too great to bear fasting on every Ekadasi. I can give in charity, I can worship Lord Kesava but I cannot fast. Please instruct me how I can obtain the mercy of Sri Ekadasi.

"On hearing Bhima's pathetic entreaty, Sri Vyasadeva said, "O Bhima, if you want to go to the heavenly planets, avoiding the hellish condition, then you must refrain from eating on both Ekadasi days each month.

"Bhima interjected: 'O Vyasa Muni! It is impossible for me to fast on twenty-four Ekadasi's per year. What to speak of fasting day and night, I cannot tolerate my hunger for even a blink of an eye. The 'brika' fire of hunger is always present in my stomach, only voracious eating will quell this formidable foe in the form of craving. With great endeavor I may be able to fast one day a year...

"Sri Vyasadeva said: 'O my dear King, You have already heard from me about the Vedic religious principles and the duties of the human being. But in this age of Kali not everyone can follow these regulations, I know. Therefore I will tell of a sublime method by which all your desires will be fulfilled. This method is the concentrated essence of all the Puranas. Anybody who observes Ekadasi of the waning and waxing Moons by fasting never goes to hell."

"Hearing Vyasadeva's words, Bhimasena grew panicky: 'But Vyas, I've said, I can't fast on two days a month, I simply can't! Please give me some easier method.

"Sri Vyasa Muni replied: During the waxing Moon in the month of Jyestha during the sun's presence in either Taurus or Gemini Rasi, there is an Ekadasi known as Nirjala Ekadasi. On this greatest of days, one should observe total fasting without even water to drink. One should observe acamana by drinking an amount of water equal to a single mustard seed. If one drinks more or less water than this, it will amount to having drunk wine.

"One must not eat anything at all on this Ekadasi, otherwise the vow is broken and the results lost. One should abstain from eating and drinking from Sunrise on the day of Ekadasi until Sunrise on the day of Dvadasi. In this way, if one successfully completes fasting on this day, he receives the results of having observed all the Ekadasi's of the year.

"Early on the morning of Dvadasi, one should give in charity to brahmanas, and thereafter breakfast with them. O Bhimasena, please hear of the abounding piety one accumulates by observing this Nirjala Ekadasi, and thereby reaps the result of all the Ekadasi's throughout the year. Once, Lord Visnu, who holds a conch, disc, club and lotus flower, told me: "If a person gives up all varieties of religion and surrenders unto Me, he is certainly relieved of all sinful reactions. One cannot attain the supreme destination by giving wealth in charity or attain any benefit by following smarta rules and

regulations in Kali yuga. In fact the Vedic religious principles are extinct in Kali yuga, which is polluted with many faults and illusions.

"O son of Vayu, what more can I say. Eating is actually prohibited on all the Ekadasi's, and even drinking water is prohibited on Nirjala Ekadasi. By observing this Ekadasi one receives the benefit of bathing in all the holy rivers, and visiting all the holy places of pilgrimage. If one follows this Ekadasi vrata he need not fear being approached by the Yamadutas at the time of death, rather he will be greeted by the Visnudutas and transferred to the abode of Visnu. If on the day of Dvadasi following Nirjala Ekadasi one gives water in charity to others, all his sinful activities will come to an end!

"When Bhimasena told the other Pandavas what he had heard about this Nirjaala Ekadasi, they all decided to observe it's magnificence accordingly. From that day onward Bhimasena began observing this Nirjala vrata, once a year. Thereafter this Ekadasi is famously known as Pandava Nirjala, or Bhimaseni Ekadasi. By following this Ekadasi sinful activities as huge as Sumeru or Mandara Mountain are at once burnt to ashes, like nothing more than a pile of dry leaves. O great devotee! Lord Krsna himself has declared that any pious activities such as taking bath in holy places, giving charity, chanting Vedic mantras, and performing sacrifices that are carried out on this Nirjala Ekadasi are magnified one billion times.

One who reads or hears the narration of the boundless glories of this Ekadasi with devotion, goes back to the spiritual abode. The result one attains by observing the vow of Amavasya conjoined with Pratipada and offering oblations to the forefathers during a solar eclipse is attained by hearing the glories of this brilliantly effulgent gemstone jewel, Nirjala Ekadasi.